Cancelling Julie Bindel is an assault on free speech

Aggressive activists want to give the impression that there is no debate to be had, that anyone who dissents from their line is a bigot.

TELEGRAPH VIEW25 June 2022 • 10:00pm

Yesterday, Nottingham City Council cancelled a talk due to be given by the writer Julie Bindel, citing her views on the trans debate. Taking its lead from Stonewall, the charity that has pushed employers and institutions towards promoting an extreme approach to gender issues as a settled matter, the Council said it did not want the event to be seen as "implicit support for views held by the speaker".

This is chilling. Ms Bindel is no reactionary: she is, by her own description, a radical, feminist lesbian and her argument against the agenda of Stonewall et al is that it threatens to undo victories won by women since the 1960s, such as the protection of female-only spaces in prisons and shelters. Moreover, many readers will find it bizarre that a public authority can cancel speaking events on the basis of ideology, deciding what can or cannot be heard, even if those views are perfectly lawful. Other feminist events have been disrupted violently and there have been serious efforts to destroy the careers of those who are critical of one particular school of thought – notably JK Rowling, whose opinions on gender were ludicrously described by a BBC journalist as "very unpopular" (the BBC later ruled this was misleading).

Some of the more aggressive activists want to give the impression that there is no debate to be had and that anyone who dissents from their line is a bigot, which is not only a dangerous infringement on free speech but damages their own cause in the long-run. If there is no opportunity for dialogue then there is no basis upon which to build sympathy and understanding on such a deeply sensitive subject.